"How David Came Home"

The Black Cat

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March 1901

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A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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No. 66. MARCH, 1901. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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How David Came Home.*

BY H. A. FILLMORE. (PHIL MORE.)

AM the pumpman at Glen Lyon pit. I have the dark for my constant companion, feebly illumined by my lamp. Over half of my life has been spent underground. My companions are my pipe, the pump, and a rat that lives under the floor of the pump-room. I throw him a scrap from my lunch and he disappears.

People say I am a silent man. It is true. Living amid perpetual silence has made me so. My wife humors me in it. When I am at home I sit by the fire and smoke in the same attitude I assume in the mines. That, and constant bending to avoid bumping my head against a low roof, account for the hump on my back. At first I was only round shouldered. But it became rounder and more prominent as my hair became grayer, and I made no effort to straighten up, rather enjoying the odd appearance it gave me and the attention it attracted from strangers. That is why I am referred to as the Pedler oftener than by my name. This only in a sly way behind my back (or what is left of it, for it is mostly shoulders now) or when they think I am out of hearing.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $125 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

My eyes and ears are keener than they were years ago, perhaps from straining for sight in the black dark and for sound amid silence, and I have purposely remained in seeming ignorance of the appellation; not that the hump in any way approaches the size of a pedler's pack, however, or looks like one.

My duties take me away from the busy scenes of the colliery. I have seen enough of that when a boy, and enjoy the quiet surrounding my pump-room in preference to the noise attending the mining and running of coal in the newer portions. I am half a mile away from that bustling region, and for all of the sounds that penetrate to my station I might be alone in the vast labyrinth of workings.

The extent of the mines that surround me is such that one unacquainted with them, and left in some heading, cross-heading or chamber, would be the same as buried. Only by chance could one gain the light of day from their intricate depths alone. And yet I am so familiar with them that I can traverse every portion, and in the dark if necessary. I grew up with their development, and now that I am old they have passed on to newer fields.

This knowledge comes from long experience and becomes an intuition. It is part of a mine-worker's education; but the man watching me from his station a hundred yards away from my pump-room, standing and sitting alternately the long day through, has made no calculation of this and expects to find me at fault some day. He has been watching me a week now and I have known it all the while. Not a very pleasant sensation, but for my son's sake I submit. He is crafty, I admit, but we shall see if he can outwit me at my own game and in my own workshop.

To explain his presence there, without light or sound (though I hear and see him), I shall have to go back one day beyond the week mentioned.

On that day, while sitting on my bench in front of the pump-room door, smoking, my attention was attracted by the appearance of a light coming toward me from the farthest visible portion of the heading. It was seldom that any one came that way, and I watched it with some curiosity.

It did not take me long to notice that the person carrying the lamp was walking rapidly. When he had come near enough his

footsteps confirmed this opinion. Wondering who it was and what his errand might be, not dreaming of the terrible reality that was soon to confront me, I discerned his face in the yellow glow. Nearer, and I thought his features were familiar. And then I recognized him. He was my son, who had left home ten years before, and had not since made his existence known.

He was breathing hard, his eyes were distended, and his whole manner was one of great excitement.

"Father!" he said, stopping in front of me.

"Is it you, Dave?" I asked.

"Yes; hide me!"

Hide him! I did not ask what for. I have read of the father who ran to meet his returning erring son. But how differently mine had come home. And with what a request!

I did not question him. His demeanor showed that there was no time. These few words were all that passed between us.

I took him inside the pump-room. Behind a case built against one of the ribs of coal constituting the walls, and in which I kept my tools and fittings, I had, during my leisure time, dug a considerable hole in the coal, to hide anything especially valuable against prying boys who occasionally visited the place in my absence. It made a good-sized vault.

I pulled the case away from the rib, showed it to him, and he went in. I shoved the case back, went out to my bench and resumed my smoking.

I mistrusted that David was being pursued. I was right. I had my pipe drawing well again, when not one, but many lights appeared at the same spot where I had first seen David's. Again I waited and watched, manifesting no more excitement than before.

The idea came into my mind that I stood between my son and safety, perhaps liberty. I did not know what he had done, or was suspected of having done, or whether those approaching were coming in the name of the law or not. In any case I would be the one against whom they would dash.

My mind worked slowly between the deliberate puffs of smoke. How should I answer their questions? I had hidden David. I would not give him up under any circumstances. That I fully determined upon before they were near.

I heard their excited talk and distinguished the person of the mine foreman leading them. They came upon me like a storm in a cloud of lamp smoke.

"Dan'l can tell which way your prisoner has gone," he said, pointing to me. "The sheriff, Dan'l."

"Did you see him pass?" the sheriff asked, stepping toward me.

I nodded. Prisoner! What had David done?

"Which way did he go?"

I pointed on up the heading.

"Was he in a hurry — running?"

I appeared to be thinking. "He wasn't running, exactly," I answered, "but I did hear him breathing hard."

"He's still somewheres ahead of us then, Lawson," the sheriff said, impatiently. "Lead on. He can't escape us."

"We will proceed cautiously," Mr. Lawson answered, coolly. "Old, abandoned workings are ahead of us, some partly filled with water, and some, maybe, partly filled with gas. We had better have a safety lamp ahead. John Henry, blow out your light and go on alone with your Davy. We'll wait here five minutes."

John Henry departed, his safety lamp shining like a glow-worm.

"Is there a chance for my man to get back into the new workings?" the sheriff asked.

"Yes. They're all connected at different points.

"How long will it take to search the whole colliery?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"Then we're in for it, unless we find him sooner."

"Not likely. Was he acquainted with mine work?"

"I don't know. His name was Limes. Any of you know him?"

A circle of negative nods passed around the group.

"Dave's changed his name," I thought. "What would the answer have been if he had asked if they knew David Gradon?"

"I think he's lived in the coal regions," the sheriff said, speculatively. "By the way he went into the slope I should say he was an old hand at underground work. We thought we had him cornered, when the slope's opening came in sight and we knew he must have gone in it."

"Where did he get his lamp?" one of the men asked.

"He went to the foot of the shaft and borrowed one of a driver

long enough to go to the pump-room and back. That's what first put us on his trail," Mr. Lawson answered. "The shaft and slope are both guarded now and it's a mere question of time before we find him. Of course he's had a good start while the sheriff was waiting for me."

"Yes, indeed," an old, gray-headed bratticeman said. "Look a-yere, now, Mr. Sheriff, give me the start your man's had and I'll back yo' yo'll never find me. He'll keep more men than's yere huntin' all night and longer. That is, if he knows the mines or anything about mines. An' he must, or why would he ask for a lamp to come to Dan'l's pump-room? My opinion is that he's back-tracked and escaped before you set your guard."

"Hardly," the sheriff answered. "I left men on guard before I came down."

"All right, then. He'll slip by them. Mind yo' we doan't find him this night."

Old Ellis was right. The search continued all night, and I learned by questioning that they had not found Limes. Of course they hadn't! It continued several days and was very thorough. Every known place in the entire workings was ransacked, some of them by successive parties of searchers.

While the sheriff was positive that his prisoner was hidden somewhere, the shaft and slope being closely guarded, he began to show less confidence. And then the idea entered my slow mind that now was the time to get David out of the pit.

The next morning after coming to this conclusion I found, on reaching the pump-room, one of the deputies asleep on my bench in front of the door. I did not disturb him, but unlocked the door and entered. I saw at a glance that the pump-room had been searched during the night. The case had not been moved.

When I went out, after starting the pump, the deputy was awake.

"Is it morning again?" he asked.

I nodded.

"I thought this miserable night would never end," he continued. "I have been into some of the most infernal holes a nightmare could conjure up. How do you manage to stand this solitary silence?"

I smiled. My smile, I have reason to believe, is not a joyous one. Still it answers sometimes better than words.

"We have been hunting for a week now, and I'm completely tired out. I fell asleep."

I lit my pipe, and held my tobacco box toward him.

"If I only had a pipe," he said, enviously.

I entered the pump-room and brought him out a new O'Brien, Dublin one, the kind I always smoked. He filled and lit it.

"I don't believe we'll ever find this man Limes," he said, contentedly. "I begin to think there's an outlet that none of us knows of."

I gazed reflectively at my lamp.

"I've ruined two suits of clothes now, and look at my hands! They're going to make one more general search — to-day, I believe. Do you think they'll find him?"

I nodded.

A crash, like a rock slipping down the side of a gob pile attracted our attention.

"What was that?" he asked.

"A bit of rock by the sound," I answered.

"Does it often fall like that?"

"No, unless moved by some one."

He cast one quick glance at me. I appeared entirely unconcerned. But I knew instantly that I was suspected. They had placed a sentinel over me.

He has been out there in the dark two days now. Without entering into the details of their last fruitless search, and the thinly veiled contempt with which the sheriff regarded me during its continuance every time he came to the pump-room, I must now show what I have known for a week — that he believes me to be hiding his prisoner, or at least possessed of a knowledge of his hiding place.

To discover that, to implicate me, to regain his prisoner and to catch me in some act of betraying myself are his objects; and I know enough of his indomitable spirit to believe that he will keep a watch set over me until he has gained his point. And not by a sign or movement have I yet betrayed to the sentinel that I know of his presence.

I have sat most of the time as I am sitting now, in deep reverie, smoking, when not attending to my pump. I have not eaten a mouthful at mid-day, either, nor drunk any of my tea for nine days. My lunch is for David. To bring an extra supply along after my fixed habits of years would cause my wife to question me, and in this matter I will not take her into my confidence.

It is now about time to let David partake of his scant rations. My pail and bottle are in the pump-room, where I put them every morning, and to let him come out and get them I take up my lamp and walk away. My course leads me directly past the watcher. He hides, clumsily enough, but I hear and see nothing, and walk calmly and slowly by. He follows.

I walk up the gangway a hundred yards. On every side are the evidences of decay and neglect. Large slabs, fallen from the roof, obstruct the path. Props, rotten and askew, support heavy growths of fungus, and nothing else. The air, even, smells old. My shadow keeps at a respectful distance, stumbling sometimes, and making noise enough for a person deafer than I have been pretending to be to hear. He must be a stranger to mines.

I imagine that he is congratulating himself that this time I am going to walk into their trap.

I turn into an old chamber; this is wider than the gangway. It also has a depression in it filled with water. Over this I pick my way on the gob pile, and when far enough beyond it to allow my sentinel to be in the middle of it, to his knees, I sit down and enjoy a half hour's smoke. This to relieve him of the tedium of walking in the dark. Then I start as I hear the thankful ripple of the underground pond among the rocks of the gob pile.

At the face of the chamber is a small door. It connects to a chamber driven up from another gangway. I pull it open. The air, taking a short cut, roars through the narrow passage, and I jump through and let it bang shut. I then hurry on down this chamber and come to the other gangway. Up this I turn at right angles.

One hundred feet farther is the entrance to another chamber. I enter it. Then I blow out my light.

It affords me much quiet amusement to hear him walk past the place I am in. When he is out of hearing I double back, and in

ten minutes am at my station in front of the pump-room. One look inside shows me that David has emptied my pail and bottle, and I sit down outside and resume my smoking.

It takes the other fellow an hour to get back. How he does it I cannot tell, but I mistrust that the workings are full of assistants.

Thus for a week I have had him following me, with few opportunities to speak to my son, for whom my heart yearns with all of a father's love. My shadow has gained a wide experience in walking in the dark, and through the worst caved-in places Glen Lyon has, and has picked up scraps of paper that I put on rocks in conspicuous places until my almanac is almost leafless. Fools! To think they can outwit me at my own game.

To-morrow, I think, I will see if he gets back so easily. There is a tunnel down the gangway, out through the rock to the vein above, long since abandoned. I will take him up that and leave him. If he comes back from there it will be because he has helpers. To make it certain that he will follow me I will take my empty pail along. He will think he is about to catch me in the act of betraying myself. He will be ready to pounce upon me, but a devious route and remote workings, choked up with débris from the roof and ribs, will have tangled his brain, so that when he is about to trap me I shall be gone and he will be lost!

Shortly after planning all of this mentally I go home. There I find by my weekly paper that the case has attracted much attention. In it is a complete account of how David eluded his pursuers, and other facts that I was before ignorant of. It grieves me to see my son portrayed as a criminal (which I only half believe), and I am given due prominence, which angers me. The logic of the article is keen and reasonable. I quote:

> Limes was seen by four persons to enter Glen Lyon slope. He has not yet come out. The shaft and slope have been guarded since the moment he disappeared. It is easy to suppose, then, that he is still in the mines. It begins to look as if only one man could solve the mystery. That man is Daniel Gradon, the pump-man, toward whom suspicion is pointing a long finger. He is the last man that saw Limes. If he has not aided him to escape in some way unknown to the authorities, or fed him, Limes is dead, or nearly starved to death, by this time.
>
> Gradon has borne a good reputation for years. Against this, vague suspicion should be powerless. Yet it has been advocated that he be temporarily suspended and thus cut off the base of supplies, if he forms it.

I have quoted only part of the article, to show the quandary the sheriff was in, for he has to contend also against the opinion of some that David has escaped in disguise, notwithstanding that every one leaving the shaft has to pass the scrutiny of a company man who is familiar with the employés' faces.

Still I begin to ponder deeply over my pipe how I can get my son out of Glen Lyon pit, and so fall asleep before the fire.

The morning brings with it surprises of its own.

I am barely seated and aware of the presence of my faithful sentinel, who goes out at night after I do and comes later than I in the morning, when Mr. Lawson and a stranger visit me. The workings seem to be full of these strangers.

"Well, Dan'l," Lawson greets me.

"Good morning," I answer.

"I have brought a man in who wishes to talk with you. Mr. Gibbett, Mr. Gradon," and sits down beside me.

I am aware of a forward movement on my shadow's part.

"Yes, I have some inquiries to make," this august individual begins cheerfully, diving into his pockets and finally producing a bundle of papers from one of them. "You have a son, name of Roger — that's another case." More diving and more papers. The right one at last comes out of his coat-tail pocket. He runs to pockets and papers. "Yes, here it is. Son by the name of David. That's it, David. You had a son by the name of David?"

I nod.

"Where is he?"

I puff out a mouthful of smoke and shake my head.

"Don't know. Very well. Nice name for a boy. It occurs frequently in the Scripture. David in the Scriptures had a son by the name of Absalom. Now, I take it, that your son David, profane history, corresponds pretty closely to David's son Absalom, sacred history. I will continue. About ten years ago your son went away from home without asking your consent, broke his mother's heart, and changed the whole tenor of your own life. This I learn from your friends. From that time until one week and three days ago you did not know where he was. You shut him out of your life, or tried to. He came back as suddenly as

he went away. He came to you, here, and you took him into that starved heart of yours and protected him, and he is at present hiding away from the lawful authorities of Luzerne County, with your aid. You think you are helping him, but you are not. What inducement can I make to you to give him up?"

There is a dead silence. The tension I have had on my emotions these years till they have set becomes greater. I do not speak.

"Will you do it? What if I should state that it has been found out since his escape that he has been more sinned against than sinning? I do state that, for it is true. Yet, David has led a wild life. Evil associations, and a weak character that he evidently did not inherit from you, Mr. Gradon, probably account for it. You acknowledge that he is in hiding somewhere in these mines, and that you know where he is?"

"I do not."

"Well, let that pass for the present. Now," engaging in another series of dives after papers in his overflowing pockets, and bringing out what, on examination, proves to be the right one, "here is a history of the case he is wanted for. On the third of this month, David, while on his way back to the scenes of his childhood, falls in with two men who have the honor of having their photographs in the headquarters of police in every large city. Excuse my plain speech, but David's appearance led these men to believe that he was the same as themselves. Over a gallon of ale in a tavern they lay bare their plan to him to waylay and rob the paymaster of a contractor, who is building a new branch road, while the former was driving to the works to pay the men. Their plans were well laid, and were on the point of being carried out, but for one thing. There was a man who had been following the two through several States, ready to nab them when the opportunity came. It came.

"The paymaster's lack of nerve saved them from adding murder to their crimes, and to commit them we want David's evidence. In fact, that was about all we were holding him for. He saw fit to leave us when he had a chance. Such, Mr. Gradon, are the facts of the case. What is your answer?"

He returns the papers to his various pockets, sits down and

begins cutting notches in the bench. He looks at me sidewise several times as I remain silent, and Mr. Lawson also regards me with interest. This dumb show is engaged in for some minutes. I engage in none.

"You don't believe me?" he asks.

"You don't believe me?" I ask.

"I have no cause to doubt your word. You have said nothing that I can recall."

"I have — a week ago."

"Oh," closing his knife, "you mean that you told the sheriff David had gone by."

I nod.

"I believe that. But don't put me to the trouble of going over the case again," threatening his pockets. "You don't want me to tell you that he was last seen on this gangway by you, as you acknowledged at the time? I thought not. I leave you in Mr. Lawson's hands for that."

He rises and walks towards my sentinel.

"You are stubborn, Dan'l," Mr. Lawson begins. "The facts are all against you. Give in."

"What facts? I have heard none. Mere suppositions."

"I will use your tactics then, and say as little as you do. I will give you till this time to-morrow morning to give up Dave or tell where he is."

I smile. They are not sure of me and I know it. "And if I do not!" I ask, quietly.

"I will suspend you."

"You may as well do it now." Nothing, I reason, like being bold.

He looks as if he did not understand. "You are foolish," he says, warmly. "Don't you believe what Mr. Gibbett says?"

"This much — that the man you are looking for is my son," I answer.

"Oh, well," Mr. Gibbett exclaims from the other side of the gangway, where he leans against a gob pile, "believe what you please. I have a warrant for your arrest in my pocket, and could take you with me if I chose. But there is no hurry. To-morrow will do as well as to-day. Good-bye."

I return their nod, and watch them till they pass out of sight and hearing. Then I enter the pump-room. I empty my pail and go out with it in my hand.

My head throbs. To-morrow has come! I must get rid of my sentinel long enough to talk with Davy, my boy, for whom my heart is aching. Five minutes with him and I can decide what to do. I am the prey of doubts.

I start out. My shadow follows. For some distance we traverse our usual route; then I turn into a place I have never taken him before. It is the heading leading to the tunnel. It has been long neglected and the air smells stale and musty. I notice that the ventilation is poor, and at any other time would have hesitated about going farther. There is scarcely current enough to carry away the smoke of my lamp, but I am reckless and press on.

I come to an old board, like a gate-bar, across the heading, on which the fire-boss has chalked in large letters, DANGER! I throw it down, and start up the ascent of the tunnel.

It ascends at a sharp angle and looks black and suggestive, the complete darkness beyond the rays of my lamp hiding everything from my sight. I pause long enough to be assured that my shadow is following, and then continue on up the pitch.

The floor is rough and the roof threatening. The track was long since torn up, but a piece of old wire rope lies there. This I drag across the tunnel, and presently hear a stumble behind me.

David shall have enough time to-day to eat his lunch. Poor prodigal boy! My heart has been so filled with him, knowing him to be present and yet not daring to speak to him, that I am going to have some revenge on my watcher. It is some one's else fault than David's, I reason, for he has been pursued like a criminal, and he only an innocent boy. I am blind to his faults, and am longing to hear him say it is all false they have been telling of him. And yet — well, I shall soon see him face to face!

I stop to breathe. It is hot, close. The confined air is heavy. I am sweating. How narrow and walled-in the tunnel looks! Like a tomb! It used to be grassy in here. More than one poor fellow has been carried down this slope burned, and dead or half-dead. The thought occurs to me that there may be gas present now. I am nearly up to the vein. I shall see. I start on.

While we toil up the steep slope, look in the pump-room. A pale, drawn-faced boy (he looks only that) sits there writing on my old, greasy almanac. He has found a lamp of mine and lit it. All unconscious of the tragic, weird silence that is about him, he condemns himself. Thus he writes:

I heard all they told you, father. It is true. I can't stand staying here any longer. I am sick, tired and ache all over. I am going to give myself up. Jail cannot be any worse. You will find this when you come back and know where I have gone. I dared not tell you, for I remember how hard you always were. But I want to see you and mother. I have been thinking of her ever since you hid me. All the prayers she taught me, and said with me when I was a little boy, have been coming back, and I took to saying them. "Now I lay me" was one; "Our Father" was the other. They brought back to my mind a little boy kneeling at her ——

A gust of wind comes in at the doorway, flickers the flame of the lamp and rattles the paper. He looks up. The wind does not blow like that in the mines. What is it? Another, and stronger, raises the accumulated dust of years and chokes him. It blows the light out. He runs to the gangway. There comes a sudden roar lashing through the mines, carrying all before it, and carrying him, too, dropping him at last against a jutting pillar.

The heavens have just opened before my eyes, as I stand at the top of the tunnel. I see a light brighter than the sun, and for one awful moment know what it means. I turn to run, but the flame comes rushing back, a blue cloud of fierce, licking fire, pressing, burning, forcing everything ahead of it. I am pressed, burned, forced by it, and know no more.

. . . . . .

The explosion becomes a legend. I become a cripple, with pitted, flaming flesh, and great scars all over my body. My shadow escaped better than I. I am thankful for that, for my heart is softened.

I am reconciled to it all now. The body of standing gas I lit rent Glen Lyon workings from end to end, but, thank God for his extended mercy, no life was taken save one. They found his body, gaunt, white and shrunken — dead, where he had been hurled, with this paper and writing in his hand.

Pericles P. Pemberton: Cured.*

BY JESSIE RENO ODLIN.

"THIS is Saturday night, father." There was a note of suggestion in Miss Cordelia's voice.

"Yes," responded her father, "I know, Saturday night, and the Greeks are all gone! We begin on the Romans to-morrow." He gazed absently across the room and through the open window toward the poultry house. "We are a little later than last spring, a little later in commencing on the Romans."

"We were longer with the Hebrews," ventured Miss Cordelia.

"Yes, let me see!" The old man rose and from the clock shelf took an old ledger, which having outlived all usefulness in its ordained capacity, now served for recording the commonplace events in the life of Pericles P. Pemberton. He turned the pages slowly backward.

"Here it is," he announced at last. "March 15th. Last of the Greeks. March 22d. First of the Romans. Romulus and Remus. Baked."

"Have you quite finished your supper, father?" asked Miss Cordelia presently, seeing that he was deeply absorbed in the record. A slight motion of the uplifted head conveyed his assent and she began removing the tea-things.

Miss Cordelia was neither tall nor short, plump nor slender. Simply a well-proportioned, well-poised woman, dainty in dress and manner. Hers was not a young face, and yet the smooth, fair skin showed no telltale wrinkles; the brown eyes were clear and bright, and the auburn hair waved softly back from her forehead. Her lips were, perhaps, the least youthful of her features; red and softly curved, they had yet an expression of grave sweetness, of patience and reserve, and her smile carried with it a conviction that sadness lay repressed beneath those placid features.

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The sun was setting slowly, lingeringly, as if loath to hide himself behind the hemlocks and cedars, loath to lose sight of the picture he was illuminating with his parting radiance.

Miss Cordelia paused in the open doorway, drinking in the beauty, the glory of the scene; watching until the great red disc sank into its sea of copper and rose, and left the pointed tips of the forest trees sharply silhouetted against a fading, softening sky. Then with a little sigh of content and appreciation, she returned to her homely occupations in the kitchen.

The clearing was not large, not quite ten acres; yet, lying as it did in the midst of the great forest, it was a beautiful and restful sight to guest or chance traveller. Like a rose blossoming in the wilderness it seemed to Miss Cordelia when she returned from her brief and infrequent visits to the little town three miles away.

Ten years before, with his only daughter, Pericles Pemberton had left his Illinois home, left lifelong friends and neighbors to try his chance with fortune in the booming Puget Sound country. At first his anticipations seemed likely to be realized. Here indeed was energy, life, enterprise, more than he had ever dreamed or hoped for, and he threw himself into the current with all the vigor and energy at his command. In a short time he had acquired wealth and reputation as a prominent, pushing capitalist in a town of mushroom growth and marvellous promises. His possessions accumulated with unheard of rapidity, and he was soon reputed to be worth hundreds of thousands, in choice corner lots, stock in real estate companies, and city additions that stretched far out into the timbered hills.

Truly, Pericles Pemberton was not wrong in counting himself a successful man, in priding himself upon the rare judgment he had displayed in leaving the slow-going, comfortable home of his youth and coming to this land of promise. As for his daughter, she presided over a pretentious, well-appointed home, having her heart's content of every procurable luxury, and every dainty finery. Of social gaieties, flattering attention and would-be lovers she had also enough and to spare.

And then — well, things began to change. Money did not flow in such uninterrupted streams. Desirable corner lots declined in value with unheard of suddenness. Stock companies ceased to

declare dividends, and then, one by one, ceased to exist at all. Banks failed, real estate companies disbanded, and one enterprise after another sank into hopeless oblivion. The population melted away perceptibly. Whole blocks of stores and office buildings were vacated, and the wharves began to assume a forlorn and deserted appearance. The remnant of the residents, dismayed, bewildered, trying in vain to stem the current, finally found itself practically stranded and forced to the stupendous realization that the bottom had indeed fallen out of the boom.

When the actual truth of the situation was borne in upon Pericles P. Pemberton, all his late financial ambitions, all his energy, all his interest was gone in one breath, and he turned, helpless, confused, defeated, to Cordelia. And she, with quiet firmness and resolution, began the disheartening work of finding out how matters stood. What she found consisted of worthless paper. Notes, mortgages, deeds, mortgages, stock, mortgages, until mind and body were alike weary of the task.

How little remained of any actual value! There seemed but one thing left to do, and Cordelia determined to do it. But she need not have feared opposition from her father. He was as clay in her hands, passive, disinterested. So they moved to a little half cleared ranch in the Skagit Valley, taking such of their household goods as seemed necessary, converting all else into money. This ranch Pericles had in prosperous days jestingly deeded to his daughter, and now it opened out to them a haven of rest and refuge after troublous times.

Here Pericles found new channels for energy, time and strength, and fell to work with a will, having apparently no thought beyond the clearing away of cedar stumps, the digging of ditches, and the raising of poultry and potatoes. Under his hands the clearing improved as if by magic.

To the past he never referred, and had it not been for one instance, Miss Cordelia would have believed that he had indeed lost all consciousness of anything beyond the present existence. On this occasion he had tearfully besought her to forego any communication with former friends, with a view to keeping secret the intelligence of his signal failure after such an extraordinary season of success.

Obedient to his request, she, too, placed the past, to all outward appearance, far, far from her, made a few friends among the neighboring ranchers and residents of the little town, and settled down as he did, to a tranquil, uneventful life.

If she wondered secretly as to the fate of her old associates in both East and West, she made no sign. Those in the Eastern home probably thought of her oftener than the newer acquaintances in the West, who were of the migratory order, and followed in the uncertain wake of the boom, forgetting with cheerful alacrity everything and everybody not particularly factoring in the present tense.

So Miss Cordelia lived her quiet life, managing not only the household, but the limited financial affairs, wholly unquestioned by her father, who grew more dependent and child-like as the months went by, priding himself upon the improvement of the little ranch, and taking his chief delight in reading, or in writing a few lines every evening in the old ledger.

Perhaps he inherited from the father who had given him the euphonious title of Pericles Pythagoras, a love for the high-sounding appellations of bygone centuries. Certain it is that as the first brood of chickens emerged from their confines in the spring, he began the onerous labor of naming them, brood after brood, in chronological order, beginning with the patriots and prophets, and coming down, if the feathered numbers were sufficient, to the heroes and heroines of American history.

Those who were acquainted with this peculiar custom always wondered at the old man's power to remember and recognize these multitudinous celebrities. But with unerring accuracy Pericles could point out rooster, hen and pullet, and call it by name from some mysterious mental catalogue.

When he took a dozen chickens to town for sale, he took them from a certain period of history, and the jolly butcher used often to say to the querulous customer, "I'll warrant these chickens are all right; they are old Pemberton's chickens and maybe they're Noey and his sons and his son's wives, and maybe they're only one of the ten tribes of Israel, but I'll bet they're tender and well-fed."

It was the time honored custom on the Pemberton ranch to

have chicken for "Sunday dinner." And as he was wont to record all sales of his gods and heroes, so did Pericles record this weekly sacrifice — the names of the victims, manner in which they were prepared for the table, and the names of any guests.

On this particular evening Pericles seemed lost in meditation after he had read somewhat beyond the previous year's record of Romulus and Remus. He was sitting deeply engrossed in thought when Cordelia, her evening tasks completed, took down the lamp, lighted it, and prepared to enjoy a newly cut magazine.

"Cordelia," said the old man, at last.

"Yes, father?" questioningly.

"It is a year ago to-morrow since Mr. Benton and Susie took dinner with us. We had Brutus and Cassius stewed that day."

"Yes, father."

"It was that day, Cordelia, that Mr. Benton recommended to me the use of the Quick Conquering Compound. I used it, and you know the result. I am a different man to-day — I have been a well man for three months. I took the Conquering Compound perseveringly, and my liver, my heart, my lungs and kidneys were completely cured of a complication of maladies. You must admit, Cordelia, that I derived great benefit from the use of that valuable compound. You must further admit that its medicinal qualities are most excellent. You do admit this?"

"Yes, father." Miss Cordelia conquered the smile that rose to her lips as she heard the stereotyped phrases of the patent medicine testimonial glide from her father's lips. He was silent for a moment; then rising, he spoke with inspired decision.

"Cordelia, I hold it my duty not only to acknowledge this benefit to those who provided it, but to give my testimony to the world, that others may profit by my experience."

"In what way, father?"

"By sending my testimony and my photograph to the manufacturers that they may place it before the general public in the next pamphlet they issue." He spoke slowly and solemnly, with the air of one who has resolved to do his share towards the enlightenment of mankind.

Miss Cordelia looked gravely up into his face. "I thought you disliked the least approach to publicity, father? Suppose

the friends whom you have wished to keep in ignorance of our present circumstances should see this advertisement?"

"I have thought of that," he replied; "I have thought of all these things. But I have also thought what a selfish and ungenerous thing it would be to keep from suffering humanity the evidence of something that brings health and happiness.

"I should even be glad if — if," his voice faltered, "if Sam Graves and Judge Jamison and old Jim Armstrong could see it. They'd trust my word, and who knows but they may need a cure for some of the very ailments I had a year ago."

Miss Cordelia's eyes grew moist as she heard him mention for the first time in years the names of those old Illinois neighbors. If there had been in her heart the least suspicion that her father, in the childishness of his years, craved the sight of his own likeness on paper and his own words in print, she reproached herself for it, convinced that he was prompted by a really noble and heartfelt impulse to do good unto others.

There was a brief silence; then Pericles continued, "I know you agree with me, Cordelia, and that you'll lay out my best clothes, a white shirt and a necktie, so that I can start early Monday morning to have my photograph taken." And without waiting for an answer, he left the room and went to the poultry house, where the first of the Romans were roosting in blissful ignorance of their impending fate.

Summer came once more to the Skagit Valley, and the rose bushes, rich in color and fragrance, vied with the ivy and honeysuckle in hiding with beauty the quaint little Pemberton cottage. The garden beds bore a wealth of violets, nasturtiums, heliotrope and verbenas. People said that flowers grew and blossomed for Miss Cordelia with even more than usual thrift and luxuriance.

Pericles P. Pemberton had been a happy man for the past month. He had received a pamphlet from the Conquering Compound Co. in which a badly executed woodcut of himself appeared above his carefully worded "unsolicited" testimonial and facsimile autograph. With this had come a letter of thanks and two large bottles of the compound in acknowledgment of his flattering praise of the justly famous remedy. Indeed, all things were looking bright to the old man just now — the fruit trees, the

vegetables, the chickens, had never promised so well before. There were rumors of valuable mineral finds in the surrounding hills, and on every hand the inhabitants were discussing the approach of a second and greater boom.

Miss Cordelia, too, felt the impress of new hopes and brighter prospects that seemed to permeate the whole atmosphere. But she only sighed softly to herself as she went about her duties, and the wistfulness deepened in her eyes and upon her lips as the realization grew upon her that her youth was past, and that the future could hold little but loneliness in store for her.

"Eleven years," she whispered, sometimes, "eleven years — how old I must be growing, for I was twenty-five when we left home." No other place had really been home except that little town far east of the mountains.

It was about this time that a man, a stranger in Seattle, had stood in a drug store, listening to the conversation about him, and mechanically turning the leaves of a patent medicine pamphlet. Suddenly his attention was arrested by a signature. He studied it and the accompanying woodcut very carefully, then gave a little surprised exclamation.

"What is it?" asked a man beside him.

"Nothing," he answered; "just noticed an odd name. Pericles Pythagoras Pemberton —"

"Distinguishing name," said the other; "sure to be only one."

"Yes, surely only one," muttered the stranger, absently.

"Know him?" jested the other. But the stranger laughed, pocketed the pamphlet and left the store. At the hotel he questioned the clerk. "Where's Snywamish?"

"Little town up the Skagit. Awfully out of the way. Going up to prospect? That's where the next boom'll strike."

"Yes. I think I'll do a little prospecting," replied the stranger with a rather curious smile, as he left the office.

"Who is that man?" inquired a bystander.

"That," said the clerk, "is Armstrong — travelling for a big Chicago mining syndicate."

Meantime Armstrong was soliloquising. "Of course it's her father. She's probably married long ago. 'Twon't hurt to look them up, though. I wonder, after all these years, if —"

The next day he was in the little town of Snywamish, receiving from a garrulous landlord a full account of Pericles P. Pemberton, his daughter, his ranch and his eccentricities.

Later he met the old man on the village street, accepted his hearty invitation to "Come right out to the ranch," and set off upon the three-mile walk with what Pericles would have called "a complication of curious sensations."

As they reached the opening in the woods, and entered the little clearing, beautiful again in the sunset glow, Frank Armstrong turned to his companion and said, earnestly, "Mr. Pemberton, will you do me a favor? Years ago Cordelia and I were lovers, and when you left home, parted in a lover's quarrel. All these years while we have drifted apart I have never forgotten her, never loved any other, and it has been the dream of my life to meet her again. Will you let me go to her alone?"

The old man gazed at the speaker in awestruck amazement. Then his eyes grew dim, as he placed his hand in the warm grasp of the other and with a trembling voice, said, "Listen! She is playing on the organ — you'll find her — "

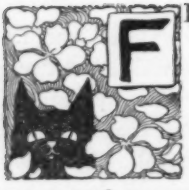
But Armstrong was already on his way.

Suddenly the low, sweet music stopped, and Cordelia, coming, at the sound of footsteps, to the little rose-covered porch, found her hands held in a tender, unforgotten clasp, and while she listened to the voice of her long-ago lover knew that for her happiness was indeed assured, and she need no longer dread a loveless, lonely future.

A little later, when blissful silence had followed mutual explanations, Pericles Pemberton entered the room, gave his paternal blessing in tender words and added in lighter vein, although his voice still quavered a little, "This is a final triumph for the Quick Conquering Compound: a wonderful healer of earthly ills — from livers to lovers." And he hied him away to the poultry yard, deciding to sacrifice Romeo and Juliet, as a most appropriate stew for the morrow's dinner.

The Blue Light on the Mountain.*

BY PAUL CRANDALL.



ROM the east window of his house on the fringe of the city, Rawson Fargo had a ten-mile view of the mountains so entrancing that he turned to it the first thing each morning and the last thing at night — when the nights were clear. Sombre one morning, gay the next, the old range took on a new look each day till Fargo thought the variety inexhaustible, but on the night of May 21st a climax was reached — when he saw the blue light on Pulpit Knob.

It was a little after midnight when he had walked over to the window to see if his old friends, the mountains, were all right before he went to bed. The moon, in its last quarter, was just rising over the Pulpit, and the silhouette of a clump of graceful trees was sharply outlined against its disc.

As Fargo stood looking at the branches traced on the moon, wondering idly whether the trees were mountain ash or oak, the lower part of the moon suddenly turned an intense blue — that impossible blue that is the color of all the lakes on all the drop curtains in the world. It only lasted a few seconds, but Fargo remained at his window a quarter of an hour or so, trying to reason the thing out, until the moon rose clear of the mountain, when suddenly the clump of trees was flooded with blue, showing that the color must be luminous in itself. This time the light did not entirely die out, but left a bluish haze behind that was most mysterious.

Fargo hunted up his field glass, opened the window and focussed upon the mystery, and as he did so he saw a clump of trees gradually uprooted by some unseen force, turned bottom upwards, and toppled down the side of the mountain.

The clock downstairs struck one. Fargo figured that he could

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ride out to Pulpit Knob on his wheel, investigate the phenomenon and return home inside of two hours — before any one of the household could know of his absence — and he felt that he would much rather do so than attempt to sleep with the puzzle unsolved.

Filling up the ammonia squirt gun which he carried for the benefit of fool dogs, he got quietly out of the house with his wheel and was soon pedalling over the seven or eight miles of highway, classified as "A4" in his road book, that separated his house from Pulpit Knob.

It was nearly two o'clock when he reached the little old brick church near the foot of the Knob. He stabled his bicycle between two headstones in the churchyard, and, climbing over the wall in the rear, faced the mountain, which loomed up dark and forbidding, while the hazy blue light gleamed against the sky, and a soft, strange, swishing noise came down to his ears.

If there was a path up the mountain, Fargo could not find it, and the climb through the scrub underbrush was a full half hour of great discomfort and exertion. His breath was short enough as he neared the summit, but when he was within twenty feet of the top, and a blast of hot air, charged with a sulphurous odor, swept down upon him, he was forced to sit on a fallen tree trunk and wheeze until he got the villanous fumes out of his lungs.

He was just beginning to recover his breath when the swishing noise increased to a muffled shriek, and he had only time to see a large tree poised above him for a moment, its roots high in air, and then go crashing past him down the mountain, before a shower of stinging sand blotted everything from sight.

"Magyary, Magyary!" he heard a hoarse voice shout, "if you let that nozzle slip again all Stuyvesant County will know by daylight what's going on up here. If you can't keep awake, I'll come out there and do the trick myself!"

Fargo could not catch what was shouted back in reply. He waited a few moments, and then cautiously crawled to the top and lay flat on the ground behind a thick growth of bushes.

About fifty feet in front of him on the flat mountain top was a rough, open shed, in which a hammock was swung, and in the hammock lay the largest man he had ever seen. In front of the

shed, between two long poles, swung a sort of censer, emitting a pungent odor. Fargo afterward remembered wondering why such a contrivance should be needed to drive off insects, when a breeze always blew over the Knob. But the man's face attracted his attention above all else. Swarthy almost to blackness, with a goatee and enormous moustache, it was the most huge and determined countenance he had ever beheld.

Farther along to the right was a queer structure that looked like a series of galvanized iron funnels, whose flaring ends, instead of being circular, were rectangular, and about the size of an ordinary box freight-car. Placed in a circle, the large openings on the outside, the small ends met at a centre like the spokes of a wheel.

At one end, on a platform, sat a man who must have been a twin to the big fellow in the shed, for he was his exact counterpart. In his hands he held a lever by which he controlled the nozzle of a pipe, out of which was rushing with great force a stream of sand, six inches thick.

Fargo took out his ammonia squirt gun — in case there should be a dog about — and moved a few feet nearer, to get a better view. In doing so his coat sleeve caught in a bush and the ammonia was squirted close to his face, causing an uncontrollable fit of sneezing.

With the agility of a cat the man in the hammock was upon him, seizing him by the shoulder and dragging him over to the platform where the other man sat, and tossing him upon it.

"That's what we get for your cursed carelessness, Magyary," roared his captor. "He's probably the advance guard of the mob that will be here by daylight."

"Nonsense, Iglick!" retorted the other, in as big a voice, and returning the black look with compound interest.

"Gentlemen," broke in Fargo, "you need not feel troubled on my account. I had no motive in coming up here except the gratification of a little harmless curiosity, aroused by the sight of your blue light. I am quite sure there's no one behind me."

Magyary backed up the protest. "Don't be such a fool, Iglick," he said, "this man's evidently all right. Tell him about it. What's the odds? The whole world will know of it in a day or two, anyway."

Iglick regarded the captive doubtfully.

"If the whole world is going to know in a day or two, you might as well let me in on this thing," Fargo hastened to put in. "I can keep a secret a couple of days, if I try."

"Oh, it isn't that!" shouted Iglick, impatiently; "it's the crowd — the chattering, gaping crowd — that I detest."

"Run a double barbed wire fence around the Knob, and you'll be let alone," suggested Fargo, fertile in expedients when his personal safety seemed threatened.

Iglick ruminated over the matter in a heavy way for a moment, and seemed mollified by the idea. "I'll think of it," he said. "Meantime, I'll show you something that it is going to revolutionize the world."

Taking Fargo over to the east side of the Knob, he exhibited a chain of elevator buckets, running down into a natural pocket of sand. The buckets emptied into a large hopper, built over the funnels from which the sand blast was fed.

Iglick looked enquiringly at Fargo, who answered:

"I see; but what's the power that makes the thing go?"

"What was the power that moved all the ships on all the seas a hundred years ago?"

"The wind," replied Fargo.

"Well, the wind is the motive power of this plant," explained the big man. "A good stiff breeze is blowing over the Knob now. It is caught up in the funnels and runs a motor built under them. We are developing eight hundred horse power," he said, pointing to an indicator, "nearly all of which is used by the sand blast over there," glancing at Magyary at the nozzle.

A puff of sulphurous air came over from the blast, and Iglick looked anxiously at another indicator. Picking up a shovelful of a bluish substance he threw it into the hopper, and drawing out his watch counted off the seconds with his forefinger:

"Forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven," — from the oblong hole in the ground into which Magyary was aiming his sand blast came a deep rumbling, and then a flood of blue light rushed out and lighted up the mountain.

"Forty-seven seconds for that blue stuff to go down nearly four miles into the earth and come up again," said Iglick. "In another

hour we will be down deep enough to reach a practically inexhaustible store of heat, that will take the place of all the power and heating plants for a hundred miles around."

Just then Magyary called out to his brother and Fargo to come over to the platform.

"The runway is choking up," he said. "We'll have to get it clear, so the slag and sand can run down the mountain. Here," he said to Fargo, "you hold the lever a minute, while I help Iglick shovel it free." He hustled Fargo into his seat and put the lever in his hands.

The two giant forms had not quite reached the edge of the runway, when a frightful roaring came up the sand bore, and they started to run back to the platform, shouting a warning to Fargo. Not understanding the exact nature of the threatened danger, but perceiving that it was imminent, Fargo became confused, and endeavored to divert the resistless stream of sand from the pit it was boring. In doing so, the nozzle slipped from control, and the sand blast struck Iglick and Magyary, and tore them to atoms.

The roaring grew louder and louder, tons of rock and streaks of fire shot out of the mouth of the sand bore, the iron funnels were hurled high into the air, the platform on which Fargo was perched was whirled from its foundation, and he fell, stunned and senseless, among its débris.

When he managed to crawl out, his clothes almost entirely stripped from his body, it was broad daylight. All the rubbish from the bowels of the earth, together with the ruins of the gigantic strangers' peculiar plant, had fallen back into the enormous hole they had bored, choking its entrance completely. Fargo never saw a blue light on the mountain again, nor did he ever tell his family the details of that night's adventure.

The Pocket of Goat Island.*

BY HENRY REED TAYLOR.

HANS DEUTREL, specialist in botany, had spent but a few weeks in California when he secured a permit to extend his studies in natural science to Goat Island, that government reservation forming so prominent a landmark in the harbor of San Francisco. The enthusiastic professor had spent the day delightfully, gathering specimens and roaming over the rather lofty ridge of the island, seeking out the character of the growth, in short, to be found on the "Goat's Back." That evening in his hotel in San Francisco but one regret troubled him.

"I haf loosed mein glass," he said dolefully, "and I haf not never find such a glass alreatty but in Vienna."

The mischance was rather a serious one to the botanist, and it was to be the cause of wild consternation within a few hours to a large proportion of the inhabitants of all the cities of the bay district. Professor Deutrel neglected to return to the island promptly the next day to search for his valuable magnifying glass. Had he done so it is possible that this strange story of the island would never have been revealed.

The day — it was in July — opened clear and still. The shipping lay in the blue of the beautiful bay under a dead calm, and only the stately passage of a ferry steamer or the puffing smoke from the funnel of a busy tug-boat told of life over in the great metropolis of the Pacific. The ladies appeared on the Market Street promenade in light lawn, and men of heavy weight prepared to suffer through a really hot spell of weather, though it is never known in that section of California for more than three days at a time. The sun's rays seemed to penetrate every fibre, and the "oldest inhabitant" for once was content to feebly remark, "This is what you call a scorcher."

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

About noon something was happening on Goat Island. The old professor's glass lay supinely on the parched grass of the hill and grew hotter and hotter, and when the sun reached the zenith its scorching rays shot through it glaringly like a huge diamond.

Soon a small blaze sputtered and flickered on the top of the island. The Naval Reserve about the quay and the few government employés, the light-keeper and his assistants, dozed in the shadows or idly pursued their vocations, ignorant of anything unusual impending. The master of a ferry steamer putting out from the Oakland mole saw the little fire and pointed it out to the mate with an indifferent speculation as to its origin. When the steamer reached the slip on the San Francisco side every passenger was craning his neck to gaze at devouring flames, which were spreading on the eminence.

Goat Island was afire, and the whole town knew it in twenty minutes. The men stationed there were too few in number or too ill-provided with appliances to protect the government property should the roaring sea of flame sweep toward the buildings, but the island was rather sparsely wooded, and the danger was not at first considered imminent.

Observers by thousands were soon lost in astonishment and speculation at the virulence of the fire at one spot high up on the ridge. A blackened area showed where the vegetation had been consumed, but why should the flames shoot skyward like a great funeral pyre in one spot alone? The query "stumped" the officials of the Geodetic Coast Survey, puzzled the city firemen, who received no orders and could but watch the surprising sight, and filled the timorous with vague anxiety.

What could be burning on Goat Island? Professor Deutrel thought about his lost glass with a pensive regret, but never once imagined that by gathering and intensifying the heat rays it had set a spark to that mighty furnace, causing a sight sublime, but well-nigh appalling.

The roaring of the fire was frightful, and could be heard in the city, while a towering pillar of smoke was visible for many miles. What had at first appeared merely as a grass fire, somewhat dangerous but nothing more, had become a volcano of belching smoke and darting flame.

"Hell has broken loose on Goat Island," said the Second Engineer of the San Francisco Fire Department to Chief Scannell, "and what are you going to do about it?"

"My place is right here," said the Chief gruffly, "and I guess the government will have to look after hell. Let them send for Dan Burns!" he added with a grimace.

It was clear that nothing was to be done. Some one circulated the report that an extinct volcano had long been known on the island, and that it had roused from its lethargy and might shortly be expected to spout fire, lava and blazing brimstone into San Francisco, Oakland and Alameda. Nervous women fainted, and trains down the valley began to be crowded to the guard rails.

In this extremity, when the Fire Department was ridiculing the idea of sending aid to the island, declaring that it was not paid to put out volcanoes, the veteran engine company of the city, then comprising eight "exempt" fire fighters, quietly resolved to put the regular department to shame or die in the attempt. They had their steam fire engine, a little antiquated but still effective, and led by Foreman Dennis O'Reilly, a powerful man who had won an enviable reputation for dash and courage, they hastily secured two thousand feet of hose and, chartering a little steamer, set out with their apparatus for Goat Island.

Having to ask permission of no one, the departure of the veterans was scarcely remarked, save for a ripple of astonishment at the wharf during their embarkation.

"Byes," said O'Reilly sententiously, "you've tough wur-rk ahead, like the old times ag'in, and if yez stand wid me we'll be afther makin' mud pies in that snortin' cratur this day, or me name is not Dinnis."

A cheer was the answer to this enlivening speech, and with few words the grizzled veterans prepared for a struggle on the island's summit, if they could get there. The landing was made and then came the ascent. Ropes and tackle were brought into play, and the whole force of men on Goat Island turned to to assist in pulling and shoving the fire company's "steamer" to the top of the steep hill. The task was a mighty one, but with encouraging words from the resolute O'Reilly, the heavy engine at length gained a point high up near the summit.

Then with a run the hose was adjusted and slipped down over the precipice into the bay. Fire was up and the steam engine began its glad chug-chug-chug as it got a vigorous suction at work on the salt water far below.

Flocks of sea gulls, excited by the fire and smoke, screamed shrilly on the heights to the music of the puffing, throbbing engine; the firemen ran out the hose with a will and a stream was soon playing fiercely on the fiery hillside. Fortunately there was plenty of hose, and after half an hour's hot work, scrambling and stumbling over the rocks, the fire was beaten back and the government buildings saved from threatened destruction. Foreman O'Reilly and his men had never quit a fire until it was out, and the order was to advance and keep at it.

"Faith, an' if there's water lift in the bay," asserted O'Reilly, "we'll be drivin' the divil himself out av the volcanny for fear av dthrownin'!"

Steadily the men kept at work until they had approached almost to the margin of what appeared a veritable miniature volcano, perhaps twenty-five feet in diameter at the top, and furiously vomiting flames high in air. The heat was intense, and a resinous, tarry odor was perceptible amid the dense smoke. Into this raging pit of fire, which after two hours seemed to show no diminution, seething and bubbling horribly like a devil's cauldron, the veteran firemen poured a heavy stream.

At first their endeavors seemed to have no effect other than to send up a volume of hissing vapor. But by degrees the perseverance of the exempts showed its effect, and the joy of Dennis O'Reilly manifested itself vociferously. Along in the afternoon the spouting furnace of the island, which had alarmed a wide population, had been subdued to spiteful spurts and gurgling accompaniments which denoted a near finish. Soon, indeed, the brave O'Reilly and his staunch supporters could claim with reason that they had extinguished a crater, or something very like it.

The fog bell at the light station was given one tap for "all out," a manifestation of old training, and the men were peering curiously down into the black hole, and could see that it extended sixty or seventy feet. Startling rents were visible in the solid rock, torn open doubtless by the great heat, the sides narrowing as

they descended. The fire had been a queer business, and with natural curiosity the firemen determined to sift the mystery to the bottom.

The government employés had retired from the scene, and having sent below for a stout rope, O'Reilly swore he would go to the inside of the ugly hole and ascertain "what divil of a thing was in it, annyway."

Having been warned to use discretion, his companions carefully lowered him until he alighted in safety upon a flat ledge within a few feet of the bottom of the pit. The odor in the place was powerful and savored of kerosene. He broke off a chunk of dark substance and called up that the "volcano" had been filled with tar. What the adventurer held in his hand was, in point of fact, a half consumed piece of natural asphalt, and highly inflammable. This discovery heralded another so astounding that for the moment the supposed tar was forgotten.

"By St. Pathrick an' all the thunderin' divils of the volcanny, there's sunthin' been bilin' in this here pot — an' the stuff's yaller!" came up in excited, muffled tones from O'Reilly.

It was, for a fact, yellow, and the "stuff" formed the kernel of what has since been spoken of by old miners with something like awe. The yellow metal, turned to light in so unexpected a manner, was gold, formed into a mass of wealth which would have made a dais for the Incas — a chunk a foot or more in depth, according to conservative statements, and six feet or over in diameter.

No one knew of the immense find but the veterans of the exempt fire engine company. They had won it by signal bravery and enterprise when all others held aloof, and it goes without saying that they appropriated the regal nugget in chunks like coal without a qualm of conscience. It seemed to be, in miner's parlance, a "pocket," all in one lump, but enough in that one piece to satisfy the wildest ambitions of eight men.

There might be some legal question as to rights of discovery on a government reservation, and to avoid needless dispute the precious nugget was quietly removed in sections, carried away secretly in sacks and later minted into good gold coin.

The marvellous discovery was naturally kept for a long time

a secret, and their intimates wondered when some of the rough ex-firemen retired to spend their remaining days in palatial homes on Van Ness Avenue and Nob Hill. The exact value of the find seems to be still in doubt, but all agree that it was fabulous in extent. Certain it is that the exempt company has established a trust fund of two hundred thousand dollars for the widows and orphans of firemen.

Masses of asphaltum, or bitumen, ooze out of the earth in certain parts of California, piling up like lava beds, but savants say that it is impossible that the hidden mass set afire on the island's summit by the fortuitous agency of the glass of old Professor Deutrel could have come there by itself. It is believed that it was stowed away on the heights by the Indians a century or more ago, for possible use as a signal or great council fire. To the aborigines gold has a superstitious significance only. The Siwash of Alaska knows where the yellow "tinka" is to be found, but will never betray it. All he will reply to questions is, "No tinka! White man fool." It is the same with the Indians of California, and for some inscrutable purpose one of the ancient tribes may have securely hidden the *cache* of gold under the mass of asphalt.

Another hypothesis is that the simple aborigines were entirely ignorant of the presence of the precious deposit, and that the gold rested fallow for ages in the seams of the rock. By a strange chance it was to become molten, running out into a natural bowl, there to be uncovered at last as that marvel of the land of sunshine and gold, the Great Pocket of Goat Island.

The Phantom Dromedary.*

BY HENRY ADELBERT THOMPSON.

SUFI was a queer companion for an ex-Connecticut Yankee. He was undoubtedly an Oriental, but whether Persian, Arab or Turk I never knew. He spoke excellent English and gave many evidences of being an educated man. From his physical vigor and ability to bear severe labor and hardship I would have judged him a young man; but the grizzled hair and beard, the peculiar leanness which comes only with age, and, most of all, the face lined and furrowed like the serrated sides of an extinct volcano, marked him as one who had long passed the half-century mile-stone. We met in Ehrenburg when that was a thriving placer town. I soon found that Sufi knew considerable about mining and that he was a faithful and efficient workman. That was enough to satisfy me and, as life in the West discourages the asking of impertinent questions concerning the past history of one's acquaintances, I made no further inquiry and Sufi vouchsafed no further information.

We prospected and mined together for seven years, travelling about the whole southwestern mineral belt. Beyond a fair living, our discoveries did not amount to much. At last, in the Eagle Tail Range in southern Arizona, we found a ledge of gold-bearing ore which promised liberal remuneration for the expense and labor of development. This vein was three feet in average width and extended fully a mile along the summit of a rough spur, which pushed out into the desert to eastward. We built an arastra, the power to operate which was furnished by our burros, and, even with this primitive method of reduction, extracted gold in paying quantities.

One evening about nine o'clock — we had been four months in the place — Sufi picked up the pail and started to the spring, a

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couple of hundred yards from the camp. In a few minutes he came running back, without the pail, breathless, trembling and speechless with fear.

"Why, Sufi!" I cried, "what on earth is the matter?" His lips moved convulsively in the effort to reply, but no word could he utter. Then, writhing and contorted as if with an epileptic fit, he fell to the ground. I seized a canteen and forced some water down his throat, bathed his forehead, chafed his hands and finally succeeded in quieting him in some degree.

"What has happened?" I asked again. "What did you see?"

"Chu — Chu — Chushah!" he gasped. "The dromedary! And She was on it. It's a ghost, Mayhew."

"A dromedary! A ghostly dromedary!" I echoed in amazement. "Why, man, you're crazy! And who is 'She'?"

"I — I — I saw it," he stuttered. "It came for me. I am a lost man!" And he relapsed into incoherent mutterings in a language I did not understand.

It then occurred to me that Sufi had possibly caught a glimpse of one of the wild camels that roam the unfrequented portions of the desert of southern Arizona and northern Mexico, and I said as much to him. But he refused to accept such an explanation. It took me half an hour to subdue his excitement so that he could arise and walk about. Then I offered to go to the spring and get the pail.

"Don't leave me alone, Jack," he cried, in a fresh paroxysm of terror. "Don't leave me, I beg of you. Use the water in the canteens; that will be enough until morning."

I turned back, yielding to Sufi's entreaties, and insisted that he should go to bed at once. He did so, but I do not believe he slept half an hour during the night. I was confounded beyond measure by my companion's conduct. All I could get out of him was that he had seen a phantom camel, ridden by a phantom woman, striding across the plain near the entrance to the little gorge in which the spring was situated. As to who the woman might be, I could not elicit from him the slightest information. Again and again I thought over the strange occurrence after Sufi had retired and I sat by the campfire, smoking my pipe. I knew him to be an unusually courageous man. Once when I had wounded a large puma

and the shell stuck in my rifle, Sufi stopped the infuriated animal's charge with a knife thrust. At another time he calmly faced a desperate gambler who was threatening to shoot him, and dared his antagonist to do his worst. I had seen him tried in a score of ways and did not believe he knew the meaning of fear; yet here he was, shaking and chattering at the fancied sight of a phantom. It might be the outcropping of a latent superstition, inherited from his Oriental ancestry; but this hardly explained the uncontrollable terror he had manifested, for I could not remember that my comrade had ever shown any of the ordinary symptoms of that uncivilized weakness. That he might have seen a wild camel was entirely possible, since they had been frequently reported in that section of country. But why should he clothe flesh and blood with apparitional characteristics? I began to fear that his mental balance was affected, and this conclusion, for want of a better, remained with me for some time.

The next morning Sufi was more than usually silent and distrait. He parried my questions petulantly, and then abruptly.

"Look here, Mayhew," he said finally. "I must have been mighty nervous last night. I imagined I saw the ghost of one who called up unpleasant recollections and whom I desire to avoid. It may have been the result of the heat of the day, or a sudden fit of some kind. I don't want to discuss the matter any further."

I was far from being satisfied with the lame explanation, especially as it was late autumn and the days were comparatively cool, but there seemed to be no alternative to dropping the subject. My comrade did not recover his usual spirits for days. He had always been a man of few words, and was now less than ever given to speech. But he worked as hard and as intelligently as before, and, to some extent, the matter faded from my mind.

Nearly two months passed and the time approached for one of us to go to Fort Yuma, seventy-five miles distant, for supplies. It was Sufi's turn, and he saddled one of the burros and rode away, leading the other. We bade each other a cheery farewell and I turned to my work.

On the evening of the ninth day thereafter, expecting Sufi's return, I sat up somewhat later than usual. I was uneasy

about him, for the journey customarily consumed a less period of time. The thought kept haunting me that I should not have allowed him to go alone. What if he had experienced a recurrence of the mania, for that I now believed it to have been, and was wandering aimlessly about on the desert or lying dead in some arroyo? Eleven o'clock came. I walked out on the trail and looked to southward. The moon was shining brightly, and objects were clearly visible at a considerable distance. As I stood scanning the horizon line for sight of some moving object, there arose, away off on the white, dusty pathway, a screech of mortal fright, followed by an awful, moaning cry. Hurrying to the tent, I seized my rifle and dashed in the direction from which the sound had come. Within two hundred yards I met the two burros, with full packs, plunging wildly toward the camp, and braying in a perfect abandonment of fear. They passed me like a shot. I sped on, hardly daring to conjecture what had happened, but trying to convince myself that the cry was that of a mountain lion. It did not occur to me that if such were the case I should almost certainly have heard the crack of Sufi's Winchester.

After a run of nearly half a mile, I came upon my partner, lying face downward in the trail, and apparently lifeless. Turning him over, I chafed his hands and endeavored to restore his respiration. In a few minutes he gasped once or twice, and then opened his eyes.

"Sufi, speak to me!" I demanded. "What is the matter with you?"

"Has it gone?" he asked, staring wildly around.

"Yes, it has gone," I replied; "but what scared you so?"

"Chushah, the dromedary! She waved a bloody knife at me!" Then he slowly raised himself to a sitting posture and looked me in the face. "Mayhew," he continued, "I am a doomed man. Help me to camp, and I will tell you all about it."

I assisted him to his feet, and he staggered along, leaning on my shoulder. Before he reached the tent, however, he was walking erect and unaided. We found the two burros close to the camp fire, and still snorting and quivering with fright. After unpacking them I turned to Sufi, who was seated upon a box, and leaned forward with his head in his hands.

"Come, old man, cheer up and tell me what is the trouble," I urged. For several minutes he made no answer and then, lifting his head, he regarded me doubtfully.

"Give me a drink of water," he pleaded. He drank deeply, and settled himself against one of the packs before again speaking.

"Mayhew," remarked the unfortunate man, at length, in a hesitating manner, "you and I have been comrades for many years. We have stood by each other in numerous tough places and amid countless hardships. I love you as I love no other man. You know me and yet you don't know me; for what I am about to tell you will make you loathe and despise me. Do not interrupt me, please," he continued, as I opened my lips to speak. "The story will out; I can keep it no longer. It has gnawed at my soul the full length of your life. I only ask that you judge me as leniently as possible; but I fear you will have nothing to do with me when you have heard me through.

"Nearly forty years ago an agent of the United States Government came to Egypt, where I was living, to purchase camels for use in the southwestern part of his country. It was thought that these animals, when acclimated, would prove valuable for transport and dispatch service on the arid plains and over the waterless deserts. I was acting as chief dragoman for the tourist parties of a steamship company, and when the emissary of your government, who was a young army officer, asked to be directed to some man who could assist him in the selection and purchase of the camels, he was referred to me. I was well qualified for the position he offered me, being familiar with the pedigree, speed and endurance of every herd of dromedaries from the Delta to the White Nile, and between Suakim and the Great Desert. My employer engaged to pay me a much larger salary than my situation as dragoman afforded; and it was also a part of our contract that I should accompany him to the United States, and care for the camels.

"I spent some two months in selecting the beasts, being careful to buy only the best, speediest and strongest young animals. No dromedaries in Egypt or the Soudan compared with those owned by Sheik Abdul Raman, of Salimah, a squalid Arab encampment situated one hundred and fifty miles southwest of the Second Cataract. I was especially anxious to secure the finest camel in the Sheik's

herd, desiring to use him for breeding purposes. This young male, named Chushah, "The Speedy," was famous throughout the region where his kind were beasts of travel and burden. The Arabs are careful to preserve record of the lineage of their dromedaries, as of their horses; and, while their stud books are seldom committed to writing, every true son of the desert can recite the pedigree of the animal which he rides, even though it be a long one. Chushah's ancestral tree antedated the Hegira.

"I visited Salimah, and was cordially received by the Sheik, for the Chief Dragoman was a person of consequence in those days. But, when I suggested my desire to purchase Chushah, he indignantly, and even abusively, declined to part with the Pride of the Encampment. Had his refusal been couched in more respectful terms, I would probably have gone my way without further attempt to acquire possession of the coveted beast. Among the Arab people there is no law so strong as that of hospitality. I had eaten of the Sheik's bread and salt, and felt myself entitled to respectful treatment; but when, disregarding the claims of a guest, he reviled me as if I were naught but one of the common fellaheen, my gorge rose at the insult offered by this petty chieftain of a score of black tents. I was a proud man; and with men of my race, vengeance is regarded almost as a sacred duty. The Sheik had a daughter, named, like the prophet's favorite, Ayesha. She was the belle of her tribe, although that is not saying much for her beauty. I have seen countless women, not alone in Cairo and Alexandria, but in Bedouin villages, who surpassed Ayesha in personal appearance. But she served my purpose; and since she had gone out of her way, on my first arrival, to flout me publicly and gratuitously, I had little compunction in using her to accomplish revenge for the combined affronts of parent and child. Being, to a degree, master of my own time, I determined to win the affections of the girl, and, with her assistance, escape from Salimah on the back of Chushah, aware that he would soon outstrip all pursuit.

"In my capacity of guide for tourist expeditions, I had learned many things; among others, something of the ways of women. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that Ayesha had at first scorned me, I soon ingratiated myself with her. It was the old

story of the rustic maiden and the man from the city. First, in the evening circle within her father's tent, where the men smoked and recited the old traditions while the women, behind the curtains, listened in silence, and then, in stolen interviews such as only feminine *finesse* can arrange, I dinned into her inexperienced ears strange tales of the delights of Cairo, Alexandria, Constantinople and the distant country beyond the seas. I made her believe my position in America would exceed, in power and riches, that of Egypt's ruler. A desert wooing progresses quickly; and, in less than two weeks, she consented to drug the camel guard, mount the swift dromedary, which was docile to her hand, and meet me on an appointed night.

"The scheme worked admirably so far as the meeting was concerned. I had no intention, however, of taking the silly girl with me, having determined to leave her behind, with a perfectly clear statement of my reason for adopting such a course. But I underrated her acuteness. She must have suspected a possible trick; for, when I attempted to mount the camel without her, she was quick and clung to me, fighting with the desperation of a cornered animal. Her strength and fury proved so great that I could not readily throw her off. I would, of course, have mastered her in a short time, had not her lusty screams attracted the attention of some passing travellers, who, answering the appeal for aid, spurred their horses in our direction. My rage and disappointment knew no bounds at this serious balk; for, should the relief party catch me, I knew my life would not be worth a copper. Finally, as Ayesha grasped my sheath knife, I wrenched it from her hand and plunged it into her neck. Then, mounting Chushah hastily, I sped away, just as the belated rescuers bore swiftly down upon the scene of the conflict.

"They halted a moment where Ayesha lay, and then, with wild fury, spurred their horses in pursuit. But I was already nearly half a mile distant, and mounted upon the most rapid racing camel the Nile Valley knew. Their animals were wearied with a day's ride over the hot sands; mine was fresh, and after a slight gain by the first spurt, they rapidly receded in the moonlight. All night the tireless dromedary hastened northward. When day broke, I was so far away as to be fully assured of pres-

ent safety. Late that afternoon I took my steed aboard the fast sailing vessel which was awaiting me at a predetermined point on the river. The boat made good time, having both wind and current in its favor, and I landed at Alexandria without further incident. The nomad tribes of Upper Egypt were never on the best of terms with the government; in fact, they preferred to keep as far away from governmental interference as possible. I had, therefore, little fear of judicial investigation and well-merited punishment.

The anger I felt at the Arab chief and his daughter, and my satisfaction at evening the score with them both, soon subsided, being replaced by the abject slavery of an accusing conscience. Day after day the screams of the murdered girl rang in my ears. Night after night her prostrate body was present to my mental vision; and I could see the bloody dagger lying on the sand beside her. I fell into abstracted moods, neglected my duty, and received many sharp reproofs before the vessel was loaded with its animate cargo. In fact, I think the agent of the United States would have discharged me before sailing had I not pulled myself together by a strong effort of will. The voyage to America was uneventful, and the camels were landed in Texas, where arrangements had been made for their acclimatization.

The scheme, however, failed. Many of the animals died, some escaped or were turned loose by the soldiers, who seemed to have an ineradicable prejudice against their use. This attitude on the part of the men was the real cause of the abortion, since it resulted in lack of that attention and care which were essential to success. I have never lost faith in the feasibility of the project if it were properly managed. That my confidence is justifiable seems to be proven by the fact that, as you are well aware, the camels which escaped have since drifted westward to the southern part of this territory, measurably adapted themselves to the changed conditions of food and climate, propagated their kind, and are occasionally seen, even to this day. The enterprise was finally abandoned and the remnant of the herd sold to showmen.

"My occupation was now gone; and, with some money in my pocket, I started for California to engage in mining. With the character of my subsequent life you are familiar. Time has taught

me to school the outward man to impassivity; but never, since that fatal night, has the inward man been granted a moment's peace. I was trained in Islam, the central principle of which is kismet — fate. Twice, as you know, the phantom of Ayesha, mounted on the swift dromedary, Chushah, which was let go by a soldier shortly after landing in this country, has appeared to me. It will come a third time — and then I shall die or be obliged to depart with it." Sufi paused a moment, looking out into the night with unseeing eyes. Then he resumed, "I beg of you, Mayhew, if you will deign to speak to me at all, not to argue the case. I know my destiny, and avoidance of it is impossible; it is the will of Allah."

I hardly knew what to think of Sufi's narrative. Its truthfulness I did not for a moment doubt. It was not difficult to comprehend how a man, habituated by birth and education to the semi-barbarous standards of morality held by the nomads of North Africa, could, while smarting under contemptuous insult, adopt his plan for the accomplishment of vengeance. And I was too familiar with the passion-born tragedies of Western frontier life to be surprised at the fatal *dénouement* which attended the execution of my comrade's plot.

But how to account for his persistent hallucination concerning the camel and the murdered woman? The conviction grew upon me that Sufi's mental balance, through long, brooding remorse for the awful deed of his younger days, had become unhinged. And yet, there were no other indications of such a condition. Then, too, the wild fright of the burros was not accounted for on that explanation. However, I reflected that if one of the wild dromedaries, roaming the region in which we were dwelling, had suddenly appeared close to the pack animals, they would be exceedingly likely to take severe fright. I was aware that supernatural appearances are frequent delusions of disordered brains; and, in the light of all the data, I determined to treat my comrade as if nothing had happened; but to watch him closely for any further signs of nervous breakdown.

Sufi seemed grateful for my friendly treatment, but, when he mentioned the subject at all, which was seldom, he expressed himself as resigned to the inevitable reappearance of Ayesha and the